

The Despotica (Part IV: Evocar)



By Michael Kogge; Illustration by Cat Staggs

DIREUS'PEI¹

-920 to -671 BBY

Implausible though it may sound, there are few greater patrons of the Arts than the Hutt; it is said that their slime coats every masterpiece. Yet it can also be said that Hutt care little for any of the qualities of Art that others hold dear. Kajidic leaders do not acquire paintings to marvel at brushwork, nor do they fund operas because music stirs their souls. Appreciation of the sublime is contrary to Hutt nature and is considered the emotional instinct of lesser beings. Hutt value Art for one reason and one reason alone: prestige. To be powerful, you must show that you are powerful. You must possess the very things others desire.

Seven hundred years ago, when cultural budgets were flush and audiophonic productions were in vogue, critics acclaimed Direus'pei the virtuoso playwright of the sonic stage. Direus'pei was a blind, runt of a Hutt who had a penchant for storytelling rather than schemes. Kossak the Younger commissioned Direus'pei to compose a "Great Work" based on Kossak the Mighty, the Hutt general from whom the Younger claimed descent. Since he possessed no convincing evidence of ancestry, the Younger believed a dramatic piece about the Mighty that made references to "a future nephew" might produce the same effect *The Despotica* had on Xim's legacy, and that over time, Direus'pei's myth would certify the Younger's pedigree.

For years Direus'pei toiled on the project, dictating draft after draft to his stalwart Nikto scribe, Ro Vacca, refusing to present any of the work until it was complete. When the aural form itself finally started to fall out of fashion, Kossak the Younger's impatience exploded. He seized the work-in-progress from Direus'pei and ordered it performed for his court.

Rarely is a Hutt moved to emotion by Art; rarer still the kajidic clans. Such was the case with Direus'pei's *Evocar*. Kossak the Younger squirmed into a mindless rage upon hearing the piece, for not only did the 13-episode series fail to mention the general's "future nephew" or even insinuate a bloodline, *Evocar* made Kossak the Mighty into a bloviating buffoon while lionizing Xim as a larger-than-life renegade. Bypassing any accepted history or chronology, Direus'pei instead used these famous figures to write a political screed excoriated the Hutt's continued subjugation of the natives of Nal Hutta, the Evocii. Kossak the Younger immediately consigned the playwright and all copies of *Evocar* to be engorged by Maltoran protoplasm. Yet the scribe, Ro Vacca, escaped with an older draft, and circulated it, according to Direus'pei's last wishes, among those who were held in the Hutt's thrall. Soon Hutt Space was swept up in the spirit of revolution, as the play inspired client species to turn against their Hutt lords.

The kajidics moved swiftly to crush uprising after uprising, coordinating their efforts and assisting rivals when need be, so horrified were they that a single work threatened the foundations of their power. Yet their ruthless suppression had the opposite effect, lending credence to the message of Direus'pei's play. Nikto warriors chiseled dialogue from *Evocar* on their tuskbeast pikes. Klatooinian desert seers committed the entire series to memory so as to recite them at festivals of the Fountain. A troupe of Evocii refugees from Nar Shaddaa even performed a couple episodes on public hyperspace radio as a desperate plea for Republic aid, before being silenced by hired guns. But amateur recordings managed to find their way into the vast collection of Ema Slake, and were later copied by clandestine agents of the Rebel Alliance who used them to recruit spies and soldiers in Hutt Space.

To this day, those who resent their bondage to the kajidics revere Direus'pei as "the Good Hutt." *Evocar* is universally recognized as the first work by a Hutt to confront the evils inherent in their society. Only the Vodrans, the most devoted retainers in the Hutt's employ, appear to spurn the play.

While Direus'pei's name lives on, so does the Younger's, though not in the manner he wished. For attempts, however accidental, to incite mass rebellion, the Council of Elders condemned this pint-sized imposter of the Devourer to acid transfusion. As a reminder to Hutt's of the consequences of over-embellishing one's genealogy (and not getting away with it), jars of Kossak's doo rotate on display in the main terminal of Nal Hutta's Qedriga spaceport.

EVOCAR

BY DIREUS'PEI
(TENTH DRAFT, TRANS. FROM
HUTTESE BY S.V. SKYNX)

Episode Three: "The Cry of the Evocii"

ANNOUNCER: OPENING CREDITS.

Music: Opening theme.

NARRATOR: A long, long time ago, there came a time of revolution, when rebels united to challenge a tyrannical Despot. Leading the rebels was one Kossak the Hutt, who, with trickery, an indentured army, and an Idiot's Array of good fortune, triumphed over Xim the Despot's war-machines at the Third Battle of Vontor.

Sound: Chink-chink of hammers echo across an underground pit. Roar of furnaces and bellows.

NARRATOR: But somehow Xim escaped and evaded capture, providing Kossak's rivals the ammunition they needed to call for his ouster and stake their claim on the galactic throne.

Sound: Whip cracks, far and wide.

NARRATOR: So it is now that Kossak casts his nets far and wide across the stars, offering a king's ransom if the former Despot is brought alive to his Court on Nal Hutta, the planet once known as Evocar. Kossak has yet to consider that Xim may in fact already be there...

SCENE -- SLAVE PITS OF EVOCAR

Sound: Scampering in the gravel.

EVOCII SLAVE: No... please don't...

GAMORREAN GUARD: BULLYING GRUNTS.

Sound: Sizzle of force pike impaling flesh.

EVOCII SLAVE: SHRIEK TURNS INTO WHIMPER. BODY THUDS.

GAMORREAN GUARD: WHURFLES A LAUGH.

Sound: Hammering around the pit continues. Two pick-axes chip away, one after the other.

PRISONER: (WHISPERS) Hey...hey you, with the long face.

YAAR: Wh-whoo says that?

PRISONER: Over here, in the shadows, wearing the raider-rag.

YAAR: Outlander -- we risk death if we talk.

PRISONER: Didn't hear a peep out of your friend until he was singled out. (CLOSER) I say we take the pig. You trip him up, I'll stab his head.

Sound: Scrapes pick a few times against rock.

PRISONER: Come on. My pick's as sharp as it'll ever be.

YAAR: Now is not the time, outlander.

PRISONER: You some kind of ring-tail? That was one of your own he killed.

YAAR: And Yaar will sing his brother's story forever in the Cry. But the penance is not paid. The stars have not aligned.

Sound: Axe dings rock. Pebbles scatter.

YAAR: Lom has not arrived.

PRISONER: Lom? I pray that's your word for courage, else the only song your kind will ever sing will be a death rattle.

YAAR: Lom is the mother-son with jewels for his eyes. Lom is the Acolyte who will quiet the Cry. Lom is the liberator who the Mighty Ones cannot deny.

PRISONER: Mighty Ones, hah. The Hutts are mighty only in girth.

YAAR: You have not seen their power, outlander. Yaar recalls the day they descended from the heavens, conjuring fires in the wind, candles that never ceased, beams that burned skin to ash.

PRISONER: Charmed by the pretty lights, eh? Let me guess. You begged the slugs for their secrets, and they happily consented, if your beggarly race served them for generations to come.

YAAR: How do you know the plight of the Evocii?

PRISONER: Please. I know the Hutts.

YAAR: We wish we never knew of them. For we abandoned our mother-jewel believing they were mightier than her. (SIGHS) That is the great sorrow of our Cry. Now we pay the penance until the stars align and Lom arrives.

PRISONER: Well, I guarantee he's not coming -- so unless you take the fight to the Hutts, you'll rot here, building palaces for worms.

Sound: Big smash. Splintering rock. A small landslide.

MORGG: (APPROACHING) WIND-BAG OF GAMORREAN SNORTS.

YAAR: Very sorry, Morgg. Back to work Yaar goes--

Sound: Swoosh of force pike.

YAAR: YOWLS.

MORGG: PORCINE GUFFAWS.

Sound: Another swoosh -- clangs unexpectedly against metal.

PRISONER: Poke that stick around again, pig, and find your carcass hanging on my axe.

MORGG: CHUFFS AN ANGRY RETORT.

PRISONER: What'd you say? Try speaking through your mouth for once.

YAAR: (HUFFING) Outlander... it is not wise to provoke --

PRISONER: What's the matter? Yaar doesn't like his breakfast meats? 'Cause I hear smoked Gamorrean is succulent this time of year.

MORGG: SNOUTFUL OF IRE. ARMOR SHAKES.

Sound: Duel of pike versus pick-axe. Clangs and bangs.

YAAR: Please, heed Yaar, outlander...drop the axe!

PRISONER: (HEFTS PICK-AXE) Over his dead body.

Sound: Resounding clash, echoes across the pits.

YAAR: But his pike --

Sound: Electricity courses through force pike, zips into pick-axe -- then through circuits!

PRISONER: (YELLS OUT) You honorless sow! You hit my receptors!

YAAR: -- it fries.

Sound: Axe clatters on ground. Electrical circuits flickering and fizzing on-off, on-off.

MORGG: GURGLES SURPRISE.

YAAR: (GASPS) Outlander, under your wrap, your eyes -- they flicker, they flash...

PRISONER: The pick, indigen, give me yours!

MORGG: WAR WHOOPS.

YAAR: Could it be? Has Evocar forgiven us? Has jewel-eyed Lom arrived at last?

Sound: Force pike hums as it's clocked.

PRISONER: Give it!

MORGG: BELCHES A FINAL BATTLE CRY.

Sound: Force pike cuts through the air...crashes against pick-head.

PRISONER: Go drool on your mother, swine. You can try to blind me, but you're still no match.

MORGG: PIGGY RAGE.

SHOOL: (FROM OFF) Morgg -- is there a problem over there?

MORGG: Erm?

Sound: Pike and pick disengage.

PRISONER: (UNDER BREATH) That's right, snivel before your superiors.

SHOOL: (MOVING ON) What exactly is the matter?

MORGG: WET BLUBBERS.

PRISONER: We were working. That pork-belly just wanted someone to bother.

MORGG: SNURFS BACK.

SHOOL: And why should I believe a slave?

PRISONER: Am I the one spitting all over you?

MORGG: BLASTS OF NASAL EXHAUST.

SHOOL: Indigen Yaar, can you at least, in that endearing starseer wisdom of yours, explain the situation without resorting to juvenile insults?

YAAR: We...were whispering, Adjudicator Shool.

PRISONER: (MUTTERS) Thus the slave enslaves himself.

YAAR: Elsewise, the outlander speaks true. Morgg makes it hard to meet the stone-break number.

SHOOL: Does he? Well, given Morgg's past behavior, I have reason to believe you.

MORGG: SLUDGE OF SQUEALS.

SHOOL: Squelch it, Morgg. I didn't come to Evocar to prosecute pit supervisors for their boredom. But be aware that if the Mighty One runs out of workers, he might have to indenture some Gamorreans to swing the picks. Is that understood?

MORGG: STILL JOWLING UP EXCUSES.

SHOOL: I said, is that understood?

MORGG: WINDS DOWN INTO OINKS OF SUBMISSION.

SHOOL: Good. Now go -- and make sure you clean up that other carcass so I don't have a report to file.

MORGG: BLABS AND HOOFS AWAY.

PRISONER: Back to the sty he goes...

YAAR: Yaar thanks you, Adjudicator. You are a true man of justice.

SHOOL: Flattery will get you nowhere, indigen. I sincerely doubt this incident was entirely Morgg's fault.

Sound: Photoreceptor circuits keep flickering static.

SHOOL: What's wrong with your eyes, slave?

PRISONER: Shutter malfunction. The pig zapped them with his stick.

SHOOL: Implants? How repulsive.

PRISONER: They work better than eye-patches.

SHOOL: What were you, a pirate?

PRISONER: (CHUCKLES) Yarrrr.

SHOOL: I detest pirates. I've made it my mission in life to prosecute your kind of scum.

PRISONER: So sorry we won't ever be friends.

SHOOL: Perhaps Morgg was correct. Perhaps there *does* need to be a reduction in the workforce.

PRISONER: Well, I never signed up for this job.

YAAR: Please -- this outlander stone-breaks double that of us Evocii. Without him, the palace will take many more cycles than the Mighty One wishes.

Sound: Work bell rings across camp. Collective groan of relief. Hammering stops.

PRISONER: Court's over, Adjudicator. You going to convict me or can I spend another night in my no-star accommodations?

SHOOL: What's your name, slave?

PRISONER: I've been called a thousand things. But usually I go by Xim.

Sound: Loud slap against cheek.

SHOOL: Don't play games with me, half-bot. As the adjudicator elected to bring the Despot himself to justice, I have the most impressive resources at my disposal. You don't want me to extract the information out of you.

Sound: Multitudes march by, dragging chains. A few whips crack. Hungry snorts.

YAAR: Outlander, please cooperate!. We must go else the Mighty One makes feast-food out of those who do not make the gate!

SHOOL: Yes, perhaps a Gamorrean can chew what I want out of you.

PRISONER: On second thought, since I am in such esteemed company...it's no secret the indigens around here call me, ah, Lom.

SHOOL: Lom?

YAAR: (GASPS AGAIN) *Lom?*

PRISONER: Yeah. Lom.

YAAR: So it's true...

SHOOL: That of Barseg ancestry?

PRISONER: You'd have to ask my mother. But she's dead.

SHOOL: Then let this serve as a warning, Lom. If I hear another grumble from Morgg or see even a misplaced swing of those picks, I'll toss both of you before the High Judge himself. And then you will woe the day you were given life.

PRISONER: Nothing new to me.

Sound: Gates begin to close. Large drove of Gamorreans gibbering their appetites.

YAAR: We must go! They're closing the gates!

SHOOL: I'd do as the starseer suggests. Because this time I will not stand in the way of the Mighty Ones' laws and a Gamorrean stomach.

PRISONER: A true man of justice you are, Adjudicator. May you catch your despot before he catches you.

Music: Up.

SCENE -- DUNGEON CELL

Sound: Closed confines. Incessant dripping. A deep place of the deepest suffering. Moans of every pitch and groan -- sopranos, altos, tenors, baritones -- blend together to sing a ghostly threnody.

PRISONER: By Tion's spleen -- hour after hour, they whine and they wail, like those tone-deaf fanes of Xo!

Sound: Bangs, kicks bars.

PRISONER: Just gag it or die already, and allow us all some rest! If you cravens even knew who I was. . .

Sound: The Cry continues, unabated.

YAAR: But Great Acolyte, can you not hear? We sing of you.

PRISONER: (VOICE TURNS) Me?

YAAR: We sing of the emissary of the mother-jewel, of the outlander who rattles his cage, of the starlord with a thousand names, for us but one in the same. Lom, Great Acolyte, we cry to you for deliverance.

PRISONER: Lom? The name I used in the pits? That was a joke, don't you understand? To throw that shill off my back.

YAAR: But Yaar did not laugh. Yaar's faith is strong.

PRISONER: Then you're more of a nerf than I thought. Get this straight: I care nothing for you or your miserable people. I only want one last whack at the Grand Sleemo himself before I drown in my own blood.

YAAR: Though Lom will deny and Lom will deceive, by his eyes will you know him, for they glow like the heavenly sisters of the mother-jewel.

PRISONER: These are just mechanical, you primitive. Look into them. Do you see deliverance?

Sound: Faint electric zips and zaps of blown optic sensors.

PRISONER: Or do they make your head pound, like they're making mine?

OZIAF: (FROM OFF) Master?

Sound: Dungeon suddenly gets quiet, Cry and all. Distant splashing in puddle.

PRISONER: What was that?

Sound: More splashing. Foot thumps on stone.

OZIAF: (SQUEAKY VOICE, FROM OFF) Master, are you down here?

PRISONER: Who goes there?

OZIAF: (MOVING ON) Master, it is you!

PRISONER: Get within a meter of these bars and you'll be shrieking louder than any of these cowards.

OZIAF: Master! Do you not recognize your dear and diminutive servant?

PRISONER: I have many servants. Speak your name. My photoreceptors are in disrepair.

OZIAF: Then your faithful Oziaf will fix them right once he takes you from this bad-bad place!

PRISONER: Dwarf?

Sound: Keychain rattles. Key inserted in lock, which clicks after key turns.

OZIAF: Yes, yes, master and servant unite at last!

Sound: Rusty hinges creak. Cell door opens.

PRISONER: How did you get here? How did you find me?

OZIAF: Pricked my ears and listened to all the cries and whispers in the galaxy. Never did I think I'd hear your voice down in the dungeon.

YAAR: The voice of Lom carries through stone and star in measure to his power.

OZIAF: Master, we must be quick! The guard will come.

YAAR: Lom, stay with us --

PRISONER: Paws off, runt!

YAAR: But Lom, after all this suffering, have we not paid the price? Deliver us, we plead!

PRISONER: (SPLASHES OFF) Deliver yourselves.

Sound: The Cry rises in volume, a sad song. . .

SCENE -- DESERTED STAIRWELL

Sound: . . . before fading away into the closed confines of a stairwell.

PRISONER: Skulls of Spinax, even Cron didn't groan like that under my blade!

OZIAF: Master, watch the last step.

Sound: Crumbling rock rolls down stairwell.

PRISONER: Where are you taking me?

Sound: Keys shake.

OZIAF: Your loyal servant has it all planned. He sneaked, he stole, first keys, then a speeder...

PRISONER: No speeder's going to take us off this rock. We'll need a ship.

OZIAF: Yes, even a starship!

Sound: Insert. Turn. Snap.

OZIAF: Oh no. Master...

PRISONER: What?

OZIAF: ...oh no oh no oh no... the lock -- it's changed!

PRISONER: Move, dwarf.

Sound: Feet placed. Soft thud.

PRISONER: (GRUNTS) Probably carved this door myself.

Sound: Thud. Door scrapes against floor.

OZIAF: Yes, master, I can see the sky!

PRISONER: (THROUGH TEETH) One more shove --

Sound: Loud scrape... door opens.

PRISONER: At last, the cold wind of freedom, the first breath of revenge --

SHOOL: (FROM OFF) I wouldn't start making plans quite yet, Xim.

XIM/PRISONER: Shool...

SHOOL: (MOVING ON) To think we scoured the stars, even hired Lirdarc himself to hunt you down, and there you were, Xim the Deposed, lurking right under our feet, breaking stones.

XIM/PRISONER: Out of the way or your neck will be next thing I'll break.

SHOOL: I doubt that very much. *Sound: Ungreased servomotors grind.*

ZIZO: (MOVING ON, VOCODERIZED VOICE) Halt immediately or suffer heatbeam incalcescence.

XIM/PRISONER: Wha -- Corps Commander?

ZIZO: Designation Corps Commander no longer relevant. Address this unit as zee-one-zee-zero for all future input.

XIM/PRISONER: How dare you talk to me like that! I order you to shoot this dreg law clerk at once!

ZIZO: Command rejected. Authorization invalid.

XIM/PRISONER: Invalid? Process my voice-print, you no-bit! Shoot him now I said!

OZIAF: Master, Zizo is no longer capable --

ZIZO: Voice-print identified as primary enemy Xim. Failure to further comply will result in your annihilation.

SHOOL: CHUCKLING.

XIM/PRISONER: Shool -- what have you done to muck up my machines?

SHOOL: Me? I would never even touch a button. Disgusting creatures, automata...yet useful at times, thanks to that T'iin-T'iin tinkerer of yours.

XIM/PRISONER: (FUMING) Dwarf...

OZIAF: (MOVING BACK) It was not to be like this, master, no, not like this...

SHOOL: The little genius should take more credit for his work. Not only did he save the Court the expense of a bailiff, his upgrades permitted us to discern your voice among the indigenous babble.

XIM/PRISONER: A needless waste. I told you I was here myself, but you didn't listen.

Sound: Clink open of chained cuff restraints.

SHOOL: The game is up, Xim. Give me your wrists. Let us do this in the manner of our breed.

XIM/PRISONER: Then how's your taste in flesh? Because the moment you try to put that chain around me, I will sink my teeth --

SHOOL: Zizo.

Sound: Robotic weapon arm swivels.

ZIZO: Target locked and awaiting command.

OZIAF: Master, please! There is still a chance Kossak will spare you!

XIM/PRISONER: Kossak? Is he the one who pays your bills, Adjudicator?

SHOOL: Give me some credit, Xim. Accepting payment would be against my civic responsibilities. I merely serve at the foot of galactic justice.

XIM/PRISONER: Well, if Kossak's tugging your leash, then today's your lucky day. Here. Bind my wrists. I've been dying to square off with that yellow-bellied dunghill since he turned tail on Vontor at his own challenge of a duel.

SHOOL: I knew you would comply. Stand down, Zizo.

Sound: Chains wrapped tight. Cuffs snap shut.

SHOOL: But if he deviates even a step from my lead, aim for his knees.

Music: Up.

SCENE -- GRAND AUDIENCE CHAMBER

Music: Fluter Wiles and the Licks play their greatest flunk hits.

Sound: Rabble of voices. Deals, quarrels, catcalls, and a general hubbub of licentiousness... all turn deathly quiet at the approach of robot clanks and footsteps on marble.

XIM: (SNIFFS) I may be almost blind, but I know that smell. It stank up Vontor.

Music: Dance number abruptly finishes.

OZIAF: (WHISPERS) Master, making the Mighty One angry may discourage him from mercy.

XIM: Silence, dwarf. You have squeaked enough.

KOSSAK: (SNORTS AWAKE, STARTLED, FROM OFF) [Who killed the music?]

SHOOL: O Hallowed Magnitude, forgive this disturbance. But the one I cast before you may rouse you to ineffable ecstasy.

XIM: Don't touch me --

Sound: Chains drag on floor.

KOSSAK: (FROM CONFUSED TO DELIGHTED) Huh...vah?

SHOOL: I bring you the prize of seventeen systems, the indomitable heir of Argai, slayer of Cron, sacker of Ko Vari, former crown-prince of a thousand worlds, and the villain vanquished at Vontor.

KOSSAK: [At last, we have the mighty Xim!]

XIM: Kossak.. (SPITS) Your stench precedes you.

KOSSAK: [Which will only grow sweeter once you begin to sweat.]

MORGG: BURBLES LAUGHTER.

XIM: You're here, too, Morgg? Guess every house needs a family pet.

MORGG: BOARISH SNARLS.

KOSSAK: [Where was the son of a cur hiding?]

SHOOL: Can you believe in the dungeons, with the indigens?

CROWD: GASPS OF SURPRISE.

SHOOL: A masterful disguise, I admit. No one suspected that the great Despot would poke out his own eyes to conceal himself.

XIM: I can squeeze out yours, too, if you'd like.

KOSSAK: [Even now, so arrogant. But we will see after the judgment, won't we, Shool?]

SHOOL: (CLEAR THROAT) Gentlebeings of the Court, at last it is time. Take your seats.

CROWD: SHUFFLING AND FUNNELING INTO THE BACKGROUND.

Sound: Chairs moved, bulks deposited, a chittering of excitement.

XIM: Wait -- wait just a sec. You truly mean to forge ahead with this sham trial, and not stage my execution?

SHOOL: While capital punishment does seem an appropriate punitory measure for your crimes, you must be convicted first.

XIM: Skin a Pui-ui, either I have lost my wits...or the Hutt has lost his guts!

KOSSAK: [No, poor once-mighty Xim, it is you who have lost.]

SHOOL: Unlike tyrants of previous regimes, His Immensity has listened to the pleas of his people and has pledged from this orbit forward that even the lowest vermin accused of criminality will receive a fair hearing before any judgment is passed.

CROWD: WILD APPLAUSE.

KOSSAK: [Yes, I hear you, I hear you, my people.]

SHOOL: Today's trial marks the dawn of a new age, a New Mandate for all citizens, with Kossak the Just at the helm.

XIM: (SNORTS) Kossak the *Just*?

KOSSAK: [The Empire of Xim is toast.]

XIM: Spare me the guano, Bloated One. These nerfs will soon learn there's no such thing as an enlightened despot.

CROWD: HECKLES AND BOOS.

SHOOL: Bring forward the charges, chamberlain.

OZIAF: (MOVING ON) Coming...

Sound: Stone slate pushed across marble floor.

XIM: Chamberlain? Is that what you've been doing this whole time, dwarf? Slaving for the Hutt?

OZIAF: (STRUGGLING) Master, I was only looking out for you, good master...

XIM: How dare you even call me master!

SHOOL: Your services are no longer required, chamberlain. Morgg -- fetch the slate from him!

OZIAF: I am sorry, master, so sorry...

MORGG: ROWDY YOBOING

OZIAF: (SCAMPERS OFF). . .eeee!

XIM: Like a rat to its hole. But remember, dwarf, that the Tinnell always catches its T'iin-T'iin.ii

KOSSAK: [Do not try my patience any longer. Begin this, Shool.]

SHOOL: Yes, Your Honor. (ALOUD) Gentlebeings assembled, and those trillions watching from the Maw to the Void...

CROWD: LOWERS TO A MURMUR.

SHOOL: I, Rexrax Shool, esteemed legal esquire of Ko Vari and elected adjudicator of this sector, call the Court of Evocar to session, with the Honorable Kossak presiding over the trial of the galactic citizenry versus the tyrant Xim. . .

XIM: I am a despot, *not* a tyrant.

SHOOL: Hear now, Xim, Son of Xer, the charges the citizens of the galaxy level against you-- hold them up, Morgg.

MORGG: GRUNTS AS LIFTS SLATES.

XIM: This should be interesting.

SHOOL: First and foremost, Xim, Son of Xer, you are charged with causing the extermination and extinction of nine sentient species.

XIM: Nine? I know I spaced more than that.

SHOOL: Among them the Qadel, the Ermi, the Veeza, and the Zoa'mon...

XIM: Slavers all. I did the galaxy a favor.

SHOOL: The soothsisters of Pelgrin--

XIM: Their Oracle claimed my empire was doomed. Such a prophecy could have wreaked widespread panic, even galactic war.

SHOOL: And lastly the Klee, the Izi, the Orrananans, and the Thrella.a

XIM: With the Izi. . . perhaps I went too far. But I'm not the only one who loathed their poetry.

CROWD: VOCIFEROUS DISGUST.

SHOOL: The citizenry also charges you Xim, Son of Xer, with the unjustified decimation of countless peoples and worlds, including Vodran, Jurzoo, and Ko Vari.

XIM: Of Vodran I have no recollection. But Ko Vari -- did I not just hear you were a native, Adjudicator?

SHOOL: Excuse me?

KOSSAK: [Just read, Shool. Don't let him rattle you.]

SHOOL: (DEEP BREATH) Thirdly, the citizenry charges you Xim, Son of Xer, with violating the Automata Accords by your manufacture and deployment of military robots.

XIM: Would the citizenry rather I lead another billion living beings to their slaughter? I was saving their hides.

Sounds: Clank of robot feet.

ZIZO: (MOVING ON) Objection. My steel-brothers were not built for scrap.

XIM: Neither did I build you for treachery.

SHOOL: Knowing the charges laid against you, how do you plead, Xim, Son of Xer?

XIM: Plead? Despots never plead. This court has no authority over me. Even the Code of Cron gives the Ruler of Worlds immunity from prosecution.

KOSSAK: [Hah! You rule nothing.]

SHOOL: The defendant's contempt of this Court bars him from making an opening statement. So without further ado, the prosecution calls its first witness, the Queen of Ranroon. Your Majesty, please take the stand.

INDREXU: (FROM OFF) My pleasure.

Sound: Stilettos on marble. Jewelry clinks.

XIM: Polluters of Z'gag -- Indrexu?

INDREXU: (MOVING ON) In previous days, the mere sight of me would cause you to lose breath.

CROWD: WHISTLES AT THE LADY.

MORGG: LICKS HIS CHOPS.

XIM: My photoreceptors...seem to be malfunctioning.

INDREXU: Always, always your receptors.

CROWD: CACKLES FROM ON HIGH.

KOSSAK: [Order! Sit your purge-holes down now!]

CROWD: QUIETS TO A DULL ROAR.

SHOOL: Your Majesty, please raise your right hand.

INDREXU: Do make this quick, Adjudicator. I'd hate to stand up the new King of Cron at his coronation.

XIM: Of all the half-cred harlots...

SHOOL: Your Majesty, do you swear that the testimony you are about to give is the truth and nothing but, by the Original Light so help you?

INDREXU: I swear.

XIM: After what I did for you...

SHOOL: For the record of this Court, please state your name, occupation, and point of origin.

INDREXU: My name is Hylei Indrexu Cortess, the eighth wife of Xer. I was born and raised a simple Mamzin of Ranroon, though most know me as their Queen --

XIM: A title I gave you.

INDREXU: A title bestowed upon me by my Mamzin sisters upon marriage to my beloved husband, Xer, who was mutilated by this savage here -- a father massacred by his own son, right before my eyes!

XIM: You made no complaint when you knelt to my sword.

INDREXU: That is not true.

CROWD: HISSES.

SHOOL: The prosecution demands that the defendant refrain from comment until cross-examination.

KOSSAK: [Sustained.]

XIM: There's no need, because there'll be no cross-examination. This trial is a charade. As is she.

CROWD: OOOOHH.

XIM: Check the registries. She's not from Ranroon, no Mamzin at all-- just some wench my father picked up while philandering in the Ihala.c

INDREXU: Which means you're even more illegitimate than you know.

CROWD: CACKLES AND GUFFAWS.

MORGG: SPITS JUICE EVERYWHERE.

XIM: Laugh it up, slug-lovers. I only did what any honorable son would do, when he discovered his own mother had been poisoned. It was my error that I blamed my father. I should've run my cutlass through this witch.

SHOOL: As I said, if the accused cannot stay his tongue--

INDREXU: (INTERRUPTING) Where is the proof to these outrageous accusations?

XIM: In my mother's tissue. I had her body exhumed, and tests confirmed traces of neuro-synox, correlating to the batch I found in your vanity room.

CROWD: FIRST HINTS OF DOUBT.

INDREXU: I will say it again. I did not kill your mother.

XIM: SNORTS.

INDREXU: Xim, I *am* your mother.

CROWD: SOAP OPERA GASPS.

SHOOL: STUTTERS.

MORGG: SLOBBERS.

XIM: So?

KOSSAK: (BELLY-ACHING DELIGHT) [Hohohohoho! The once-mighty Xim is a first-class bastard after all!]

CROWD: AN ECHO CHAMBER OF ALIEN LAUGHTER.

SHOOL: Order, order, please!

INDREXU: I should've strangled you at birth.

XIM: I'm glad you strangled me when you did. . .

SHOOL: Morgg, Zizo--

MORGG: CHEST THUMPING.

ZIZO: Awaiting instruction. Name targets for recommended annihilation.

CROWD: QUIETS IMMEDIATELY.

Sound: Stilettos strike marble hard.

SHOOL: Your Majesty, you haven't finished your testimony --

INDREXU: What is finished is the relationship between the Hutts and the Confederacy, unless you execute this liar immediately.

KOSSAK: [What? No!]

SHOOL: Your Honor, there are other witnesses. I am sure I can get a solid conviction.

INDREXU: Cook him, Kossak, or we're done.

XIM: Such a kind, devoted mother.

CROWD: WAITING WITH BATED BREATH.

KOSSAK: [Fine. Fry him.]

SHOOL: I must protest! This sets a dangerous precedent if we cannot adhere to the laws we ourselves envisioned!

KOSSAK: [Laws are made to be broken, stupid fool. Roast him to dust and ash, I have ruled!]

SHOOL: (SIGHS) As you command, Your Honor.

INDREXU: Forget Cron. His Immensity may get his kiss after all.

KOSSAK: SMACKS LIPS, GUTTURAL PLEASURE.

MORGG: PIPS A ME, TOO?

SHOOL: (ALOUD) Hear ye, hear ye, citizens of the Court and across the galaxy. In his Preponderant Wisdom, Kossak the Just rules that the accused is guilty of his crimes and condemns him to a slow and painful death.

CROWD: JUBILATION.

SHOOL: (MURMURS) The trial of Xim the Despot is now concluded.

XIM: So much for justice, eh, Adjudicator?

SHOOL: Unit zee-one-zee-zero, initiate the Burning.

MORGG: DELIGHTED GOBBLES.

XIM: *The Burning*, you said?

Sound: Power spirals in volume.

KOSSAK: (GLEEFUL LAUGHS) [Everyone see how Xim cringes at his end!]

XIM: Your eyesight must be worse than mine, you genderless gastropod. I've not even fluttered. And yes, somehow the Burning seems fitting-- to die by the very method I conceived will be like dying by own hands.

CROWD: SILENCED. THIS IS ONE BAD ROTWORM.

ZIZO: Beam tubes operational. State target.

INDREXU: The bastard in manacles.

XIM: Your Maker, Corps Commander. Let me show you all how a despot dies.

Sound: Weapon arm servos rotate.

ZIZO: Primary target acquired.

XIM: Behold, toadies of Kossak, the birth of a new reign of terror --

KOSSAK: [Fire!]

Sound: Focused heatbeam. Long sizzle.

XIM: TORTURED SCREAM.

ZIZO: Please refrain from movement to mitigate discomfort.

CROWD: BEGINNINGS OF NAUSEA. SECOND THOUGHTS.

INDREXU: Lock the gate, Morgg. Justice must have its witnesses.

MORGG: YUPS AGREEMENT AND PLODS OFF.

KOSSAK: [More!]

Sound: Longer sizzle. Flesh being seared.

INDREXU: As lovely as a dying supernova...

XIM: HOWLS IN AGONY.

INDREXU: Watch how his flesh congeals, Adjudicator.

SHOOL: I now see from what ilk Xim was spawned. We've merely exchanged one brand of tyranny for another.

INDREXU: And congratulations, Adjudicator. You've played a vital role.

XIM: PURE ANGUISH.

Sound: Another scream bolsters Xim's, lending added weight and volume...and sadness.

INDREXU: Zizo, incinerate his vocal cords while you're at it. No one wants to listen to him wailing like an infant.

SHOOL: I don't think that noise is Xim...

Sound: The ghostly Cry reverberates in the low frequencies and screeches the highest.

ZIZO: Alert, alert -- high frequency resonance fracturing internal gas chambers. Shutting down beam tubes.

Sound: Glass cracks. Heatbeam fizzles out.

INDREXU: Zizo-- don't stop now!

XIM: GASPS FOR RELIEF.

Sound: The Cry continues, enveloping the chamber in its echo..

KOSSAK: [What is that racket?]

MORGG: MAD PIG, RUNNING BACK AND FORTH.

INDREXU: Zizo -- just kill him!

SHOOL: But it's not Xim!

ZIZO: Source of resonance located. Indigenous life-forms swarming from dungeon stairwells.

OZIAF: (FROM OFF) Master, master, more friends for you has your faithful servant freed!

Sound: Onrush of a hundred floppy feet reinforced by a hundred shrill voices yowling their sad, wordless song.

INDREXU: The slaves?

KOSSAK: [Evocii bantha poodoo! Return to your cells or suffer my divine wrath!]

YAAR: (MOVING ON) That is not to be, Mighty One. For Lom has joined our Cry and the children of Evocar have come to sing the last verse.

KOSSAK: Morgg!

MORGG: GNASHING TEETH IN BOAR-RUSH.

YAAR: Sing, brothers and sisters! Let Morgg hear your Cry, loud and high!

Sound: The Cry doubles in volume and pitch.

MORGG: STOPS IN HIS TRACKS. PAINFUL SQUEALS.

YAAR: Return Morgg to the mother-jewel. There he can never kill again.

MORGG: SERIES OF BEASTLY CROAKS, LEADING TO A FINAL OINK.

Sound: Armor and trinkets jingle. Corpse crashes to the floor.

KOSSAK: [Morgg! My poor Morgg! You will pay for that with your lives! Vaporize them, Zizo!]

INDREXU: Do it, Zizo-- silence these wretched creatures -- shoot them all!

ZIZO: Switching to pulse cannons. Re-calibrating for maximum power

SHOOL: Maximum power? What about the audience?

ZIZO: Advise non-indigenous life-forms to disperse.

CROWD: MASS PANIC.

SHOOL: But Zizo, the gates -- they're locked! No one can get out!

INDREXU: Adjudicator, haven't you learned by now it's pointless to argue with an automaton? They compute only two possibilities. Garbage in...

Sound: Weapon arm tracks, beeping for lock.

SHOOL: (RUNNING OFF) Zizo, no! Innocents will be caught in the cross--

Sound: Pulse whisks into the center of a group.

SHOOL: SHRIEKS, VAPORIZED BY PULSE BEAM.

INDREXU: ...garbage out.

ZIZO: Non-indigenous life-forms disperse...non-indigenous life-forms disperse...

Sound: Pulse cannon unloads bursts and quiets the tenor section of the chorus, who go out on a high note.

ZIZO: (FROM OFF) Direct hit! Direct hit!

CROWD: SCREAMS OF THE DAMNED.

Sound: Walls of the chamber begin to fracture, like cracks in ice.

ZIZO: Alert, alert. High frequency resonance damaging palace structure. Ceiling vulnerable to collapse. Advise immediate evacuation.

KOSSAK:[What -- my palace! Woman! Help me!]

INDREXU: (MOVING OFF) Fat chance, Hutt. I won't be buried alive,

Sound: Pulses sweep across the chamber.

YAAR: Be not afraid, brothers and sisters. Stand your ground. Sing your Cry.

Sound: Death rattles raise the pitch of the Cry. Cracking become more frequent. Pebbles fall, clatter on metal.

KOSSAK: [Get me off this throne right this moment you salvaged bolt-board!]

ZIZO: Hutt conveyance possible only after structural restabilization. Eleven-point-three seconds to collapse. Emergency shutdown triggered for self-preservation. Advise the same. (ZAPS OUT)

KOSSAK: NOBATA!

YAAR: Brothers and sisters, step back and sing the final notes!

Sound: The Cry reaches its greatest octave. Part of ceiling falls. Rocks shower down.

YAAR: Louder, higher! Encase the Mighty One in our Cry!

KOSSAK: ROARS LIKE A BEACHED WHALE.

Sound: A storm cloud of stone rains down.

YAAR: Now fly! Soar away on the sail of our song!

KOSSAK: BELLOWS HIS ULTIMATE MAGNITUDE.

Sound: An avalanche of rock muffles Kossak to a few final bleats before drowning out all sound, even the Cry. Then, having lost its source, the cracking stops and the showers turn into sprinkles, until quieting altogether. Some long moments before. . .

OZIAF: (FROM OFF) Master? Master?

Sound: Paws scratch and scramble through the rubble.

OZIAF: There you are! (MOVING ON) What nice friends your servant found, did you not hear? Master. . . master? Please wake!.

Sound: Frantic shifting of debris.

INDREXU: (MOVING ON) Away from him, rat. He needs his mother.

Sound: Knife drawn from scabbard.

OZIAF: You-- snake of Argai! I won't let you hurt my master!

Sound: Bodies impact. Clawing and fighting.

INDREXU: Get off me you buck-toothed flea-coat! Ahhhh! My hair!

OZIAF: Nibble, yank, and scratch will be my duty until you -- (HARD THUD AGAINST ROCK FOLLOWED BY ACHING SQUEAKS)

INDREXU: No one touches this face, dwarf.

Sound: Knife clatters on ground.

XIM: (STRAINED). . . what. . . did you call him?

INDREXU: My son. . . you live -- aack! (NECK GRIPPED, CHOKING) What. . . are you doing?

XIM: (REGAINING STRENGTH AND BREATH) Returning. . . a mother's love.

INDREXU: (RASPS, WHEEZES) Ximmy...please...

XIM: Pucker up. I deserve a goodbye kiss.

Sound: The smack of lips. . . a sucking sound. . . biting. . .

INDREXU: THROAT GURGLING SCREAM.

XIM: (MOUTH FULL) There. (SPITS) That forked tongue will never have to lick Hutt tail again.

Sound: Flesh tail lands on stone.

INDREXU: BLABBERING INCOHERENTLY, SCREAMING OFF.

XIM: (RISING) Go run back to Cron. I'm sure he'll appreciate your newfound quiet.

Sound: Rock and shale tumble off body.

OZIAF: (FROM OFF) Master. . . so sorry. . . your servant, too weak. . . his head pounds. . .

XIM: Up, dwarf!

OZIAF: ...master? He lives! My master lives! Master and servant both live!

YAAR: (MOVING ON) As do a few who sung the Cry.

OZIAF: (JUMPING AROUND) Yes yes! All those who love the master live!

XIM: I...must be in hell.

YAAR: Can you not see, Great Acolyte? The pits have opened. The skies have cleared. And beyond, the stars. . . the stars have moved, Great Lom. They have moved.

XIM: First of all, I'm not your Lom. Secondly that's what stars do. They move. And I'm going move with them, off this putrid slimeball.

YAAR: Putrid? Slimeball? But Evocar is Paradise once again!

XIM: No Paradise ever stunk of Hutt. Outta the way, runts.

OZIAF: Master, wherever you go, know that your most loyal and faithful and courageous servant is with you...

YAAR: Great Acolyte Lom, the Children of the Mother-jewel too will serve.

Sound: Gaggle of Evocii follow, thumping floppy feet.

XIM: Dinos of Dellalt, must I forever be smothered by pipsqueaks! A true despot should speak only to the heads of Death itself! Where are my war-robots?

OZIAF: Stowed away on your treasure ship, master, as hidden as can be!

XIM: What do you mean, *hidden*?

OZIAF: Hidden so secretly that no will ever find them-- for your faithful engineer randomized your ship's robo-helm to keep it forever from the master's enemies!

XIM: (MOVING OFF) Dwaaaarf!

Music: Up and under.

NARRATOR: Xim may have survived the slave pits of Evocar, but his return to galactic despotism is far from complete. He has no army to defeat the remaining rebels, and the Evocii, though their Cry can shatter stone, would be butchered on any battlefield.

Music: Closing theme.

NARRATOR: Hence Xim knows his victory will be short-lived unless he can locate his lost treasure ship, the *Queen of Ranroon*, crewed by the last legion of his dreaded war-robots, lost somewhere in space.

ANNOUNCER: CREDITS.

Music: Plays out to a final fade.

Sound: Wind whistles over the desolation, until there comes the scattering of rocks and whir of servomotors.

ZIZO: Structure stabilized. Safe for reactivation.

Sound: Gears grind to life. Stones clank off metal.

ZIZO: Assessing unit damage.

Sound: Beeps in the wind.

ZIZO: Beam tubes...shattered. Pulse cannons...pulverized. Right ambulator...impaired. Apparent damage to main processor. Accessing identity subroutines. Unit zee -- ERROR -- ERROR -- command-control circuit shorted...unit code unknown...master unknown...loading emergency backup...loading...loading...files not found. Reverting to processors-in-memory. Final reboot before potential shutdown...(BLEEP, BLEEP)...reboot successful. Core identity load successful. Please address this unit as zee-eye-emm-emm for all future input. Awaiting command.

Sound: Cranial turret spins.

ZIZO: Master-control unresponsive. Signaling vicinal steel-brothers for updated corps dispatch.

Sound: Antenna rises. Garbled transmission begins.

ZIZO: Steel-brothers unresponsive. Ninety-four-point-two-percent possibility that this unit is the last unit standing. Must take all precautions. Testing left ambulator.

Sound: Metal feet crunch on debris.

ZIZO: Operational. Testing particle discharger.

Sound: Zap blasts open rock.

ZIZO: Peak performance.

Sound: Torso swivels, weapons arm tracks.

ZIZO: Attention potential life-forms. Heed this war-robot of Xim.

Sound: Succeeding blasts blow up boulders.

ZIZO: Annihilation imminent.

1: At the time of the revolts, the Elders divested Direus'pei of his full kajidic clan name, effectively erasing him from Hutt memory.

Postscript to the Third Edition

There are kinds of Works, my brother-in-Xim Roldan Nokx is fond of saying, that encapsulate the entirety of a being's sapient existence. Often these undertakings tread into the hinterlands of insanity, and not infrequently lead to mortal peril. Yet when one is possessed by an unbridled Enthusiasm for such endeavors, rarely does danger, death, or the threat of utter obscurity deter one who has caught the bug. Though rivals may rocket past him in garnering honors and his own romantic interludes may wither like premature cocoons, he in his determined toil cannot -- and does not -- allow these worldly affairs blind him from the Work at hand. The life-journey of his species affords but a fleeting moment of sentience, and he must spend it wisely, or never finish what he was Called to Do.

For at the end, in the vast scheme of the stars, the Work will be what matters -- that which he fondled in clutching dreams, wiggled with through all his podal changes, even bit down on budding silk glands to bring to a close. When he wandered through the stacks of Obroa-skai, he resisted the temptation of digressive knowledge and made straight for the datatapes marked X. When he decoded a fragment from an antique log-recorder, he secreted it, in Despotic



fashion, until it had its place in the Work. When it looked like there was no more to be found, he sought more out, in the folly and wonder of what humans call Adventure. And during the dark times, when all seemed lost, the Work kept him buzzing. It was his remedy for melancholy, his amusement against hyper-travel tedium, the true love of his larval life. His Destiny.

But why was I of all beings chosen for this mission, this Work you now read? Why was my mind overcome with such indescribable joy when, on a bad date to a Sullustan dinner theater, I first heard the chorus of *The Pirate Prince* that it led me here? I cannot say. Who among us can truly explain their destinies? All I know is that I have done all I can, pulling together every bit of *The Despotica* my 16 appendages could grab and three cortexes could process for the pleasure of all. Surely, there are more tomes out there to be discovered, as there are more to be written. But the call for chrysalis is too sweet for me to further the search. My cocoon is spun, and when I emerge, the Work will but be an afterthought, the fancies of the larval stage.

Go brave, young scholar, take my torch, and dare the dark of Xim. Know that I am with you in spirit, if not in body. As you unearth new discoveries, I will be soaring in the clear skies above the banks of the warm, pink Z'gag, batting my chroma-wings, singing to a new love, whatever it may be.

--S.V. Skynx
emeritus chair of the Department of History
Human History subdepartment, pre-Republic subdivision
University of Ruuria
and
Ximologist extraordinaire